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GOVERNOR BARBOUR ANNOUNCES MISSISSIPPI COAST ENVIRONMENTAL RESTORATION INITIATIVE

Effort seeks to restore 10,000 acres of habitat over next decade

(Moss Point, Mississippi) -- Governor Haley Barbour today unveiled a 10-year plan to restore 10,000 acres of critical estuarine habitat along the Mississippi Coast, bolstering marine life and the seafood industry and enhancing protection from future storms.

Governor Barbour outlined his plan to representatives of environmental and conservation groups and local officials at a news conference set against the backdrop of the Pascagoula River at the Pelican Landing Conference Center north of Moss Point. Governor Barbour said the initiative is the largest environmental restoration effort in the history of the Gulf Coast and a perfect example of how conservation and economic development can work together in a true partnership.

Restoring habitat is vital to renewal of the Coast, particularly after the pounding the region took from Hurricane Katrina on Aug. 29, he said.

"We will not only undertake efforts to restore habitat critical to marine life, but, in the process, we will rebuild those resources such as the barrier islands, marshes, and forests, which serve as our first line defenses against storms and hurricanes," Governor Barbour said. "Further, we will infuse new life into economic functions important to the Gulf Coast, such as the seafood and tourism industries as well as recreation."

Partnering with natural resource and conservation organizations, private industry, federal agencies -- including the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and NOAA -- and other entities, the Mississippi Department of Marine Resources will carry out an effort to restore, enhance, or create coastal forest, tidal marsh, sand beach, barrier islands, and oyster and artificial reef habitats.

The effort will be a two-phase approach. Phase one will focus on the restoration of habitat to pre-Katrina levels, while phase two will strive to achieve pre-Camille status along the Gulf Coast.

Short term objectives include removal of Katrina-deposited debris in the Mississippi Sound and contiguous waterways, an effort that is already in progress under an agreement among the state, FEMA, Coast Guard, and DMR. Governor Barbour also proposed restoration of shrimp and oyster habitat in tidal marshes, and restoration of 55 acres of marsh on the northeast side of Deer Island.

Longer term objectives include restoration of Petit Bois, Horn, Ship, Cat, and Round Islands, whose footprints were reduced by Katrina. The initiative would restore dunes, beaches, sea grass beds, and vegetation, offering more protection from future storms, habitat for a multitude of coastal species, and new recreational opportunities for residents and tourists.

“These restoration efforts will be comprehensive and expensive,” Governor Barbour said. “While daunting, it is vital to restoring and renewing the Mississippi Gulf Coast, and it is a goal we must achieve.”

Some funding for parts of the plan are already in place and Governor Barbour said he would seek out all funding options from governmental and non-governmental sources.

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